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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: YOUNG DEPUTIES UNDERSCORE PARTY DIVIDES

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Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary. A lunch with three young MPs, all under 35 years old, underscored the fact that the three main factions share common policy ideas, but have such strained relations that any cooperation in the next year or two could be situational and uneven. Olena Bondarenko (Regions), Yuriy Pavlenko (Our Ukraine-People's Self-Defense), and Oleh Lyashko (BYuT) met with the Ambassador on November 2 to discuss coalition building and needed government policies. The three young politicians were not shy in expressing their disdain for each others' parties -- Lyashko said internal differences within OU-PSD were hurting the orange coalition before it even got started and Bondarenko accused OU-PSD of hypocrisy in publicly badmouthing Regions and then negotiating with them privately. Bondarenko and Lyashko several times sidetracked into mutual recriminations about corruption among party leaders. Both Lyashko and Pavlenko believed that the orange coalition would prevail and succeed in forming a coalition in the Rada and a government, while Bondarenko expressed Regions' willingness to sit back and watch them fail. At the end of the lunch, all three agreed that WTO accession would happen soon, that European integration was vital, and that the three parties share views on social policies. None had thoughts on ways they could change the way the Rada works, and Bondarenko and Lyashko were especially dismissive that they, as young parliamentarians, had any influence over the decision-making of their factions.

¶2. (C) Comment. It was interesting that this new generation of politicians was not interested in discussing intraparty cooperation or looking for ways to solve problems together, but rather strongly defended their party interests and hewed to party line. In fact, an effort to build intraparty ties between young politicians that we'd heard about from other contacts has now been shelved until the fractious discussions regarding a coalition conclude and the new Rada's work is underway. Although the lively conversation never became tense or unpleasant, the three young politicians' heated debates underscored that despite broad agreement on key policy priorities, the rivalry between the three parties will continue to overshadow cooperation. As a result, any coalition or government is likely to be short-term and possibly unstable. Comments from Bondarenko and Lyashko about their lack of influence with their party leaders also highlighted the top down control with which Regions and BYuT operate. End summary and comment.

Coalitions: Orange First, but For How Long Questionable

¶3. (C) Regions MP Bondarenko started off the conversation by

admitting that BYuT was better prepared for the September 30 elections and that while Regions had still gotten the most votes, it had lost its advantage in the Rada. She thought that a coalition between Regions and OU-PSD would be unstable and a "constant headache". She believed that Regions actually shared more in common with BYuT as both parties represented big business, but said they would never work together because their views on how to run the economy were diametrically opposed. OU, in her opinion, was a party of intellectuals; their value-added in any coalition was in bettering Ukraine spiritually and culturally. Bondarenko said that because she did not believe there would be any real stability in the political system until Ukraine underwent another parliamentary election and the 2009/2010 presidential election, her preference was for some sort of temporary or technocratic government in the short term. She also said that until the next set of elections, policy discussions will be focused on questions of balance of power and the constitution, instead of on reforms or other needed legislation.

¶ 14. (C) BYuT MP Lyashko jumped in next to promise that BYuT would never be in a coalition with Regions. Problems within the orange coalition, he argued, were internal OU-PSD issues; OU-PSD kept breaking promises. Lyashko said that they had made a lot of concessions to Yushchenko, but there was a limit. He also predicted that if OU-PSD went into a broad coalition, they would meet the same fate as the Socialists (i.e. not be reelected to the Rada).

¶ 15. (C) OU-PSD MP and former Minister of Youth and Sports Pavlenko countered to say he had worked in the 2005 Tymoshenko Cabinet, and that she had had the opportunity to implement her policies, but did not. This spurred a heated exchange between Pavlenko and Lyashko over whether Tymoshenko had been constrained in 2005 by Yushchenko and OU or if she had failed of her own accord. Pavlenko then added that he did not believe in an OU-Regions coalition. They had tried

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it in August 2006 when they signed the Universal and OU got 7 seats in the Yanukovych Cabinet; that had lasted at most 100 days. Moreover, OU-PSD voters wanted an orange coalition. The test will be whether the coalition can get 226 or more votes for the Speaker, the PM, and the Cabinet. If the orange coalition can demonstrate that it is viable, Lytvyn will support it, according to Pavlenko.

¶ 16. (C) Pavlenko added that he had had lunch recently with Regions MP Borys Kolesnikov, Rinat Akhmetov's lieutenant and Regions' campaign manager, who had told him that he was in favor of a Regions-OU coalition. This precipitated another heated debate among all three party representatives over which parties worked better or worse together and which parties kept their promises. Bondarenko suggested that the collapse of the orange coalition might actually benefit OU. Lyashko countered that Tymoshenko was like a phoenix, coming back stronger after every setback -- either she will be PM and make lives better or she will go into opposition and become President in order to achieve her goals. Pavlenko worried that the three factions would be so busy trying to undermine and make each other look bad that the country would suffer. The President, he said, had called on all three parties to work together, which was the right thing to do.

¶ 17. (C) Bondarenko then told Pavlenko that OU-PSD was the height of hypocrisy and stupidity, shouting to the world that it will never work with Regions, then negotiating privately with Regions about a possible coalition. OU leaders, she argued, are embarrassed to look their voters in the eyes. In contrast, Regions has always been open to working with anyone who wants to work with them and is the "most generous" of all the parties. When Moroz said the speakership was his price, Regions gave it to him. Bondarenko said that people tell stories that Regions is not united, but that is a lie. Bondarenko finished by saying that she was convinced that no

one will attack Yushchenko during the next presidential elections more than Tymoshenko, but OU-PSD continues to work with her.

Policies: More in Common

¶8. (C) When the Ambassador steered the conversation to policy priorities, all agreed that their respective parties shared major policy goals. They all thought that WTO accession would happen soon and that the Rada would be ready to ratify the accession agreement and any last minute additional legislation required. Pavlenko believed that all the major factions will support two-thirds to three-quarters of legislation, because their positions are the same. He also thought that although there was controversy right now surrounding legislative goals listed in the coalition agreement, these were technical disagreements that would be worked out. All three also agreed that European integration was a key priority, although there was less unanimity over NATO, which became another heated discussion with Bondarenko dismissing the need for NATO and arguing instead that EU membership was the critical goal for Ukraine. The three party representatives, when pressed, also all agreed that RosUkrEnergo needed to be removed as middleman in the gas relationship with Russia, although Pavlenko and Bondarenko warned that it would be difficult to do and would result in higher gas prices. Finally, they admitted that there were few differences in their parties' social policies.

¶9. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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